

## **The New Government: Implications for Fire and Rescue**

### **Purpose of report**

For information and discussion.

### **Summary**

This paper provides an introduction to the new Ministerial arrangements for the Fire and Rescue Service and the priorities for the new government. The Rt Hon Mark Francois MP is one of the two Ministers of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government and he has responsibility for Fire and Resilience. Due to other commitments the Minister is unable to attend this meeting. Neil O'Connor, Director for Fire Resilience and Emergencies at DCLG, will be attending to set out the government's priorities for Fire and Rescue in this Parliament, the challenges faced by the sector and how the Department and the sector can work together to address these challenges.

### **Recommendation**

Members are invited to consider the commitments set out in the Conservative party's manifesto and the legislative programme set out in the Queen's Speech, which are summarised in paragraphs 4 and 5 of this report, as a basis for discussing how Fire and Rescue Authorities can work with government to overcome the major challenges faced by the sector.

### **Action**

Officers to action as appropriate.

**Contact officer:** Lucy Ellender  
**Position:** Adviser  
**Phone no:** 020 7664 3321  
**E-mail:** [lucy.ellender@local.gov.uk](mailto:lucy.ellender@local.gov.uk)

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### **Ministerial appointments**

1. The Prime Minister has confirmed the new Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government as Greg Clark MP. The Rt Hon Mark Francois MP has become the new Minister for Communities and Resilience, which includes fire and rescue services.
2. Mark Francois is the Minister responsible for:
  - 2.1. coastal communities and Thames Gateway
  - 2.2. fire and resilience
  - 2.3. departmental finance and corporate issues
  - 2.4. overview of local government policy and finance
  - 2.5. deregulation
  - 2.6. lead minister on the Devolution Bill
  - 2.7. Minister for Portsmouth.
3. The Minister was previously a member of Basildon District Council and served as the Vice-Chairman of the Housing Committee between 1992 and 1995. He was elected as the MP for Rayleigh in June 2001. He has held a number of positions in parliament and most recently, prior to his appointment as Minister of State for Communities and Resilience he was the Minister of State for the Armed Forces since October 2013.

### **Conservative manifesto commitments and the Queen's speech**

4. Prior to the election, the Conservative manifesto made a number of commitments that have implications for the fire and rescue service. There was a commitment to enable closer working between Police and Crime Commissioners and Fire and Rescue Authorities and proposed changes to trade union legislation. The full list of manifesto commitments related to fire were:
  - 4.1. Enable fire and police services to work more closely together and develop the role of our elected and accountable Police and Crime Commissioners. (pg 59)
  - 4.2. Tackle the disproportionate impact of strikes in essential public services by introducing a tougher threshold in health, education, fire and transport. Industrial action in these essential services would require the support of at least 40 per cent of all those entitled to take part in strike ballots – as well as a majority of those who actually turn out to vote. (pg 18)
  - 4.3. Repeal restrictions banning employers from hiring agency staff to provide essential cover during strikes; and ensure strikes cannot be called on the basis of ballots conducted years before. (pg 18)
  - 4.4. Tackle intimidation of non-striking workers; legislate to ensure trade unions use a transparent opt-in process for union subscriptions; tighten the rules around taxpayer-funded paid 'facility time' for union representatives; and reform the role of the Certification Officer. (pg 18)

5. The Queen's Speech took place on 27 May. The Trades Union Bill was announced as a part of the speech setting out what the Government intends to do to on striking in the public sector. The main elements of the Bill are noted as:
  - 5.1. Introduction of a 50% voting threshold for union ballots turnouts (and retain the requirement for there to be a simple majority of votes in favour).
  - 5.2. In addition to the 50% minimum voting turnout threshold, introduction of a requirement that 40% of those entitled to vote must vote in favour of industrial action in certain essential public services (health, education, fire, transport).
  - 5.3. Tackling intimidation of non-striking workers during a strike.
  - 5.4. Introduction of a transparent opt-in process for the political fund element of trade unions subscriptions. This will reflect the existing practice in Northern Ireland.
  - 5.5. Introduction of time limits on a mandate following a ballot for industrial action.
  - 5.6. Making changes to the role of the Certification Officer.

#### **LGA Activity**

6. The LGA has written to the new Minister reiterating the position set out in our 100 Days document on the need to use risk as the basis for funding and also to underline the importance of a sector-led approach towards transformation. We will be continuing to engage with the Minister and have invited him to an initial meeting with Lead Members.
7. We are currently drafting our spending review submission and we have sought to give continued prominence to fire, particularly the financial challenge and the need for government to recognise the role the sector is developing in meeting a wider range of priorities including those in health and social care.

#### **Next steps**

8. The Minister is keen to attend the Fire Commission and we are currently working with his office to confirm his attendance for the next meeting.
9. Following the discussion at the Commission the key issues will be discussed at the Fire Services Management Committee.